

# Teaching English Spelling

A practical guide

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**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2000

Reprinted 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Sabon 10.5/12pt

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data applied for*

ISBN 0 521 63971 9 paperback

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# 1 Vowel sounds

## 1.1 Short vowel sounds

### *Lesson plan*

This unit deals with the students' listening awareness of both short and long vowel sounds. You might note that there is no universally agreed concept of what each vowel sound should be. Although this book uses the phonetic symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet, which is based on Southern British English pronunciation, there are many other acceptable pronunciations which you could check in a good dictionary.

Each word, when sounded out, has one or more beats. Each beat is a syllable. In every beat (syllable) we usually hear a vowel sound. A vowel sound occurs when the mouth is open, the air can flow freely and the tongue is at rest. The vowels are 'a' 'e' 'i' 'o' 'u' and sometimes 'y'. One or two vowel letters may combine to make one sound, as you can see in the following:

one-syllable words	two-syllable words	three-syllable words
can	can - dy	can - di - date
hope	hope - ful	un - hope - ful
weight	weight - less	weight - less - ness

When writing, students may rely only on their auditory memory, that is, they write the way they remember the sound of a word. (The word 'week' may be written as 'wik', if that is what the students hear.) Therefore, in this unit, the differences between the various short vowel sounds are practised. Next, students are introduced to the differences between the short **and** long vowel sounds. Later units will deal with each long vowel sound individually.

- 1 ELICIT: Ask students for the names of the vowels. Write them on the board: **A E I O U**. Remind the students that all the other letters are called consonants, apart from **Y**, which sometimes acts as a vowel and other times as a consonant. (In less advanced bilingual classes, this part of the lesson can be done in mother tongue.)

## Vowel sounds

### 2 WRITE ON THE BOARD:

<b>a</b>	<b>e</b>	<b>i</b>	<b>o</b>	<b>u</b>
cat	bed	big	hot	fun

Ask students to give other words that follow the same CVC (consonant – vowel – consonant) pattern of letters and add them to the table.

Students copy the table and three examples for each vowel into their notebooks.

### 3 ASK: What sound does each vowel have when it is ‘sandwiched’ between two consonants? Answer: The vowel does not say its name, but is pronounced as a short sound: /æ/ as in *cat*; /e/ as in *bed*; /ɪ/ as in *sit*; /ɒ/ as in *hot* and /ʌ/ as in *fun*.

The vowel will be pronounced in its short form in VC words, like *at, it, up, on*.

You might want to explain to more advanced classes that this pronunciation does not apply to some one-syllable words that end in ‘-ld’, ‘-st’, or ‘-nd’, where the vowel sound is long: /aɪ/ as in *kind, mind, child*; /əʊ/ as in *old, most, post*.

## **Warm-up practice of short vowel sounds**

### \* *Beginners*

In turn, students say aloud to the rest of the class one short vowel sound, without revealing the name of the vowel being pronounced, for example, Student A says ‘/ɪ/’ as in *sit*. The other students must guess which vowel is being referred to. Do this until all the vowel sounds have been covered and students feel confident in identifying the short vowel sounds.

### \* *Intermediate*

Write on the board:

**bag beg big bog bug**

You should now carefully pronounce each word out loud to the class. Tell the class that when the next word is called out, they must identify which word was said and write it down in their notebooks. It’s a good idea to go over the correct answer after each word and possibly re-test words that were problematic for the students.

*\* Advanced*

The following are a number of listening exercises that use the same list of words and are aimed at strengthening the students' perception of the five short vowel sounds. You could either write the list on the board or photocopy it and hand out to each student.

*Listening Exercise – Short Vowel Sounds*

1 bad bed  
 2 cop cup  
 3 bit bat  
 4 mud mad  
 5 chip chap chop  
 6 drunk drink drank  
 7 an in on  
 8 pet pit pat  
 9 hut hot hit hat  
 10 bug bag big beg

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- 1 Dictate one word from each line. Ask the students to underline the word they hear.
- 2 Another way you might like to consider is to read out all the words from each line, but at random. Students number the words in the order they hear them. For example, (line 5), the words are read out in the order of **chop**, **chip** and **chap**. The students would write their answer like this:

2	3	1
chip	chap	chop

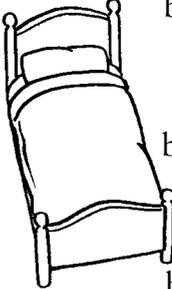
- 3 Students work in pairs, taking turns reading out one word from each line. The partner must identify the word by pointing to it on the page.
- 4 Taking turns, one student dictates a word and the partner writes it down, without looking at the list.  
 You might like to ask the students:

- What difficulties did you have when doing these exercises?
- What was easier for you?
- Which sound/letter did you have most difficulty with?

**A Beginners**

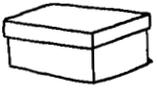
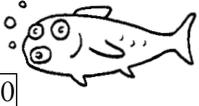
**1 What am I?**

Circle the word that is the name of the picture. Do at least six.

 <p>cat cot cut</p> <p>1</p>	 <p>bag big bug</p> <p>2</p>	 <p>bad bud bed</p> <p>3</p>
 <p>pin pan pen</p> <p>4</p>	 <p>bit bat but</p> <p>5</p>	 <p>hot hat hut</p> <p>6</p>
 <p>cup cap cop</p> <p>7</p>	 <p>dig dog dug</p> <p>8</p>	 <p>track trick truck</p> <p>9</p>

2 Pick a letter – make a word

Choose one letter from each box to make up the name of the picture. Write the name on the space at the side. Do at least seven.

1		b r	a e	m d	— — —
2		d b	o u	k x	— — —
3		f p	i a	t n	— — —
4		p d	e o	g q	— — —
5		t k	i e	n d	— — —
6		r b	a u	s c	— — —
7		z s	o u	n b	— — —
8		sh ch	e i	p f	— — — —
9		pr fr	a o	g j	— — — —
10		f d	u i	nd sh	— — — —

### 3 Vowel trivia

Read the definition, then choose a suitable vowel to complete the word, which matches the definition. Can you do at least 14?

**A      E      I      O      U**

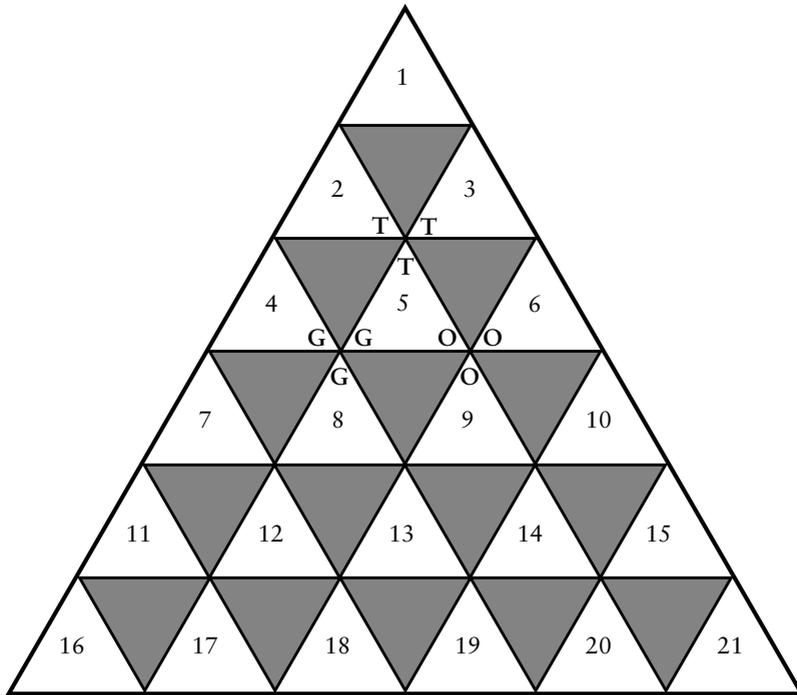
- |           |                   |             |                     |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 1 p __ g  | a farm animal     | 11 d __ ck  | a swimming bird     |
| 2 m __ p  | found in an atlas | 12 h __ t   | not cold            |
| 3 r __ d  | a colour          | 13 s __ x   | a number            |
| 4 h __ nd | has fingers       | 14 w __ t   | not dry             |
| 5 m __ n  | not a woman       | 15 n __ ck  | a giraffe's is long |
| 6 l __ ps | part of the mouth | 16 b __ d   | not good            |
| 7 f __ x  | a wild animal     | 17 dr __ ss | a girl may wear it  |
| 8 t __ n  | a number          | 18 c __ p   | you drink from it   |
| 9 g __ lf | a game            | 19 d __ sc  | for the computer    |
| 10 r __ n | not walk          | 20 d __ ll  | a child's toy       |

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### **B Intermediate**

#### 1 *Triangular words*

In each triangle, write a three-letter word that is an answer to its clue. Write each letter of the word in the corners of the triangle. Make sure the word is written in the triangle with the same number as its clue. Words can be written either clockwise or counterclockwise. Where the corners of the triangles meet, the letters are the same. To help you start, the answer is given for clue five. Solve at least 15.



**Clues**

- |                        |                                |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Not a woman          | 11 Past of 'do'                |
| 2 10                   | 12 It becomes a flower         |
| 3 Turn it on for water | 13 One of many bones           |
| 4 Precious stone       | 14 A can                       |
| 5 Received             | 15 It blows air                |
| 6 Policeman            | 16 To tear                     |
| 7 Earth and water      | 17 A colour                    |
| 8 It covers the floor  | 18 Place to sleep in           |
| 9 To go bad            | 19 Quickly in and out of water |
| 10 A lion, for example | 20 Used for frying             |
|                        | 21 Not thin                    |

2 Compound word picturegram

In this exercise, there are picture, word and letter hints. Use them all and discover the compound words. Try to do at least ten.

1  + set = \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

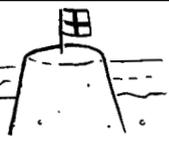
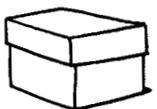
2  + mill = \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

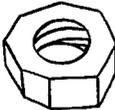
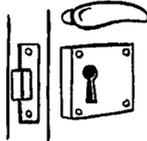
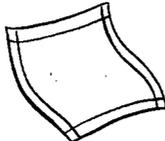
3  + stick = \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

4  + club = \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

5  + stick = \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

6  +  = \_ nth \_ ll

7  +  = s \_ ndb \_ x

8		+		= h _ ndb _ g
9		+		= b _ db _ g
10		+		= n _ tsh _ ll
11		+		= _ i _ _ _ e _
12	pad	+		= _ _ _ _ _
13	pig	+		= _ _ _ _ _
14	dish	+		= _ _ _ _ _
15	hot	+		= _ _ _ _ _

**C Advanced**

**1 Vowel inserts**

Read the definition to complete each word with its correct 'short' vowels.

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| 1 A thief or robber                    | b _ n d _ t           |
| 2 It could be mathematical or personal | p r _ b l e m         |
| 3 A quick meal or snack, with bread    | s _ n d w _ c h       |
| 4 Vegetable for Cinderella's carriage  | p _ m p k _ n         |
| 5 One more than twins                  | t r _ p l _ t s       |
| 6 Open footwear for the summer         | s _ n d a l           |
| 7 A brass wind instrument              | t r _ m p _ t         |
| 8 A competition                        | c _ n t _ s t         |
| 9 A serviette                          | n _ p k _ n           |
| 10 A tooth doctor                      | d _ n t _ s t         |
| 11 Created something original          | _ n v _ n t e d       |
| 12 Like a devil                        | s a t _ n _ c         |
| 13 Big American river                  | M _ s s _ s s _ p p _ |
| 14 Bad behaviour                       | m _ s c _ n d _ c t   |
| 15 To live in                          | _ n h _ b _ t         |



*Vowel sounds*

**Answers**

**A1**

1 cat 2 big 3 bed 4 pen 5 bat 6 hot 7 cup 8 dog 9 truck

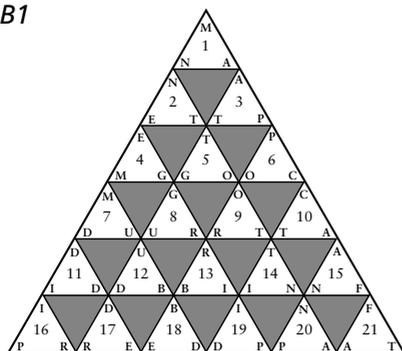
**A2**

1 bed 2 box 3 fat 4 dog 5 ten 6 bus 7 sun 8 ship 9 frog  
10 fish

**A3**

1 pig 2 map 3 red 4 hand 5 man 6 lips 7 fox 8 ten  
9 golf 10 run 11 duck 12 hot 13 six 14 wet 15 neck  
16 bad 17 dress 18 cup 19 disc 20 doll

**B1**



**B2**

1 sunset 2 windmill 3 drumstick 4 fanclub 5 lipstick  
6 anthill 7 sandbox 8 handbag 9 bedbug 10 nutshell  
11 fishnet 12 padlock 13 pigpen 14 dishcloth 15 hotdog

**C1**

1 bandit 2 problem 3 sandwich 4 pumpkin 5 triplets  
6 sandal 7 trumpet 8 contest 9 napkin 10 dentist  
11 invented 12 satanic 13 Mississippi 14 misconduct  
15 inhabit

**C2**

1 laptop 2 hangman 3 grandstand 4 hunchback 5 slapstick  
6 jetlag 7 penpal 8 whiplash 9 bullfrog 10 cockpit

## 1.2 Short and long vowels – a comparison

### Lesson plan

*Note:*

Recognizing the difference between short and long vowels is difficult, especially when you must make a connection between the sound and the letter(s).

The exercises in this unit provide an opportunity for students of all abilities to strengthen their ability to differentiate between short and long vowel sounds on the first level: listening differentiation.

- 1 WRITE ON THE BOARD: Draw the following table with only the headings.

1	2	3
vowel	short sound	long sound
a	mad	made
e	red	read
i	win	wine
o	hop	hope
u	cut	cute

- 2 ELICIT the five vowels and write them in column 1, reviewing *orally* their short sounds in words such as **cat**, **bed**, **big**, **hot** and **cup**.

Then fill in the **minimal pairs** as shown in columns 2 and 3. (In these minimal pairs, the consonants remain the same but the vowel sound differs.) It is a good idea to stress the difference in the vowel sounds for each pair. *Note:* In the long vowel sound, **the vowel says its name**.

- 3 PRACTISE the different sounds with a short listening comprehension. Read one of each pair of words and ask the students to identify which word they hear and write it down.
- 4 PAIR PRACTICE: Students can ‘test’ each other on the same list of words. One student reads a word and the partner has to say whether the vowel is long or short.

**Warm-up practice for comparing short and long vowel sounds**

The following listening exercises should be done in progression with all students. You might like to adjust the vocabulary according to the level of your class.

- 1 Write the following pairs of words on the board for the students to copy into their notebooks. Students have to differentiate between sounds: the sound /ɪ/, as in *big* and the sound /i:/, as in *seem*. Dictate one word from each pair. Ask the students to underline the word they hear.

SHORT	LONG	SHORT	LONG
ship	sheep	kiss	keys
sit	seat	this	these
fill	feel	fit	feet
hit	heat		

- 2 In this exercise the students have to differentiate between five short and five long vowel sounds. Dictate one word from each pair and the students underline the word they hear.

SHORT	LONG	SHORT	LONG
bat	bait	sell	seal
rat	rate	cut	cute
bed	bead	sock	soak
pop	pope	fit	fight
sit	sight	red	read
mad	made	duck	duke
bed	bead	cot	coat
not	note	still	style

- 3 In this exercise the students have to differentiate between five short and five long vowel sounds. Students may work in pairs, taking turns to read out one word from each line. The partner must identify the word. For additional challenge, suggest that the identification be done within two to three minutes.

ship	shape	hat	hate
shop	sheep	heat	hit
cup	cop	mean	men
cape	cap	man	mine

duck	Dick	Tim	time
dock	duke	tame	team
pop	pipe	fit	fat
pope	pip	feet	fight
read	red	tone	ten
rod	rid	tin	tune

4 Write the following sets of words on the board for the students to copy. Working individually, students say each word quietly to themselves. If the vowel sound is short, they write *ʌ* above the vowel letter(s). If the vowel sound is long, they write *ɔ*.

man	jeep	main	line
red	stand	hope	Jack
job	night	week	my
day	prize	high	boat
stone	great	wine	sad
name	coke	print	joke
mule	rose	buy	cup
pet	type	weight	twin

Their answers should look like this:

<i>ʌ</i> man	<i>ɔ</i> jeep	<i>ɔ</i> main	<i>ɔ</i> line
<i>ʌ</i> red	<i>ʌ</i> stand	<i>ɔ</i> hope	<i>ʌ</i> Jack
<i>ʌ</i> job	<i>ɔ</i> night	<i>ɔ</i> week	<i>ɔ</i> my
<i>ɔ</i> day	<i>ɔ</i> prize	<i>ɔ</i> high	<i>ɔ</i> boat
<i>ɔ</i> stone	<i>ɔ</i> great	<i>ɔ</i> wine	<i>ʌ</i> sad
<i>ɔ</i> name	<i>ɔ</i> coke	<i>ʌ</i> print	<i>ɔ</i> joke
<i>ɔ</i> mule	<i>ɔ</i> rose	<i>ɔ</i> buy	<i>ʌ</i> cup
<i>ʌ</i> pet	<i>ɔ</i> type	<i>ɔ</i> weight	<i>ʌ</i> twin